

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Pärnu College
Department of Tourism Studies

Kaisa Rahuoja

**THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE SELF-DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ON
USERS' PERSONAL WELLNESS, HABITS AND LIFESTYLE**

Master Thesis

Supervisor: Melanie Kay Smith, PhD

Pärnu 2015

Recommendation for permission to defend thesis

.....

(Supervisor's signature)

Permission for public defence of thesis granted on 2015

Head of the Department of Tourism Studies, Pärnu College of the University of Tartu

Heli Müristaja.....

This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

.....

(Applicant's signature)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
1.1. Measures of Wellness, Habits and Lifestyle	7
1.1.1. Measures of Wellness	7
1.1.2. Habit Formation	9
1.1.3. Lifestyle Segmentation Theories.....	11
1.2. Online Consumer Behaviour with a Focus on Generation Y	12
1.2.1. Consumer Behaviour.....	12
1.2.2. Online Consumer Behaviour.....	14
1.2.3. Characteristics of generation Y	16
1.3. Conceptual Framework for the Study	19
2. Methodology	23
2.1. Assumptions and Research Development	23
2.2. Research Methods	24
2.3. Data Collection and Analysis	26
3. Results and Discussion.....	30
3.1. Results	30
3.2. Discussion	39
Conclusion	45
References	48
Appendix 1	56
Appendix 2	58
Appendix 3	60
Appendix 4	61
Summary in Estonian	65

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to determine, what kind of influence various online self-development websites have on the users' personal wellness, habits and lifestyle. Thus, the research question answered by the end of the paper stands: "How do the online personal development platforms influence the users' personal wellness, habits and lifestyle?"

The master thesis consists of three main chapters. In the first chapter, an overview of theoretical background in the topics of measurement of wellness, habit formation, lifestyle as well as online consumer behaviour is provided. The second chapter aims to introduce and justify the methods chosen to find the answer to the research question. It includes methods on sampling, data collection and data analysis. The third part of the dissertation will present the results of the research and discuss the relevance of the findings. The thesis ends with conclusion and a summary in Estonian language.

The research question consists of three parts: firstly, the influence on the users' personal wellness is determined using an online survey, which was compiled using the TestWell framework developed by National Wellness Institute. The results were compared to a reference group – a group of individuals from the general population that have taken the survey on TestWell.org. Secondly, using content analysis, the comments left by the users on the websites were analyzed in order to understand how the online platforms have assisted users in changing their habits. Thirdly, some aspects and concepts are presented that provide some insight into the lifestyle of the users of the websites and how the users' lifestyles have been influenced.

The research outcomes could be used by the online service providers to make sure their services are compliant with the needs of the users. In further research it would be interesting to find out how the goals of the service providers are in line with the customers' expectations. Also in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the influence these online platforms have on the users, a longitudinal study could be performed with a larger sample size, so that more generalizations could be made regarding the issue. When using the longitudinal study, it would be possible to determine if and how much precisely the online services raise the level of personal

wellness for the users. However, this kind of laborious study does not fit in the frames of a master's dissertation, and therefore was not undertaken in this case. Furthermore, some additional categorizations in terms of market segmentation and lifestyle segmentation theory could be conducted to further understand the population.

Online platforms, that are included in this study, focus on providing information and guidance for the users in fields that can be categorized into various dimensions of wellness. All of the websites have both complimentary and paid content in the form of videos, lectures, tests, guides and e-books. They also give the possibility for users to connect with likeminded individuals. The online platforms included in the study will be described in detail in the literature review.

Not a considerable amount of research has been done previously in measuring the influence of online platforms on user's personal wellness in various dimensions. However, many service providers are using internet as a channel to promote healthy lifestyle and wellness. As these companies are web-based, they reach a wide audience from around the world. It can be estimated that all the companies included in the study have approximately 2 596 000 Facebook followers combined, which shows that the topic of self development is relevant to a large quantity of individuals. The study has important implications also for the service providers. It gives them a neutral academic look on the customer's motivations to use their services, habits and lifestyle as well as the products and services impact on the user's personal wellness. Taking into consideration the findings of this study, it becomes possible to implement some changes into their products and services to better serve the customers' needs.

A mixed methods approach with the research strategy of netnography was chosen as it is relevant in conducting research in the online environment. The methods of online survey and online content analysis were chosen for data collection in this study as the goal was to research online environments and reach respondents from all around the world and the author would not have been able to be present to administer the survey in person. In addition, administering the surveys via mail would have been too time-consuming for the research.

The author used several theoretical constructs to make conclusions about the research findings. However, it should be stated that the study has several limitations: firstly, the sample used in the online survey is not sufficient to make any big generalizations about the data, since the estimated total population is 2 600 000 individuals. Secondly, since not an extensive amount of research has been done in this field, the theories and frameworks used in this study had to be adapted from various different fields of research such as costumer behaviour, psychology, sociology and wellness, therefore the approach cannot be backed by previous similar research.

The research will rely on the definition of wellness as provided by Dunn (1959). It will use the 50-question survey developed by the National Wellness Institute (1992) to measure the level of personal wellness among the users of online personal development services. When answering the research question the theories of lifestyle segmentation (Belk, 2013), habit formation (Duhigg, 2012) and online consumer behaviour (Bray, 2008) were used. As the majority of online users are considered to be of the generation Y, the different characteristics of generations are also provided (Jang, Kim, & Bonn, 2011).

In terms of the research methods, the research strategy is built on the framework of netnography, which has been intensively developed by (RV Kozinets, 2010).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The first chapter aims to give an overview of the concepts and theories researched in the master thesis. It covers the relevant ideas regarding consumer behaviour focusing specially on online consumer behaviour targeted on the female audience. It is relevant to the study, because it is expected that the majority of the users of online personal development platforms are women. As a majority of the web-users are expected to be part of generation Y, a brief description of the demographic is provided in order to later make comparisons in the empirical study. Secondly, the literature review covers the concepts of personal wellness and pursues to choose the most suitable measures of wellness for the empirical research. The chapter provides an overview of the concepts of lifestyle and habit formation in order to determine the frameworks that could be used when answering to the research question.

1.1. Measures of Wellness, Habits and Lifestyle

1.1.1. Measures of Wellness

The term wellness was first mentioned by American doctor H. Dunn in the 1950-s. Dunn, (1959). It was intended to promote a healthy life by creating healthy lifestyle and habits rather than focusing on illness prevention.

Wellness refers to activities and behaviour patterns which improve quality of life and increase personal potential (Ansbaugh et al., 2009). It is clear that wellness is more of a process – i.e. to maintain good health – rather than a goal. Nowadays, wellness is, at its core, a synonym for a positive understanding of health. It increasingly stands for healthy behaviour in everyday life and leisure. There is thus both a traditional and a newer, more comprehensive, understanding of the concept of wellness.

As the aim of the research is to measure the level of personal wellness for the online platform users, it is important to choose the most appropriate measurement tool for this action. There are currently several frameworks with different variations that aim to achieve this result. The following paragraph looks at variations of such models.

Witmer, Sweeney and Myers (1993) created the holistic wellness model originally consisting of 16 dimensions that were later categorised into major life tasks and it was later named the Wheel of Wellness. It contained the following dimensions:

- Spirituality - a profound depth of appreciation for life,
- Self regulation - measures the ability to cope with oneself, work recreation and
- Leisure - ability to integrate a lifestyle, friendship and love.

The model is based on theory and empirical research in the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, religion, education and behavioural medicine.

Witmer and Sweeney (1992) proposed the model as contextual and suggested that wellness is affected by education, media, government, and other factors, none of which explicitly refer to the impact human–nature interactions have on wellness.

The IS-Wel concept (Myers & Sweeney, 2005) is a further development of the Wheel of Wellness moving towards a global scale and focusing on the indivisibility of self. Myers and Sweeney (2008) proposed the IS-Wel as an ecological model wherein individual wellness is affected by local, institutional and global contexts. The global context was defined as factors “that connect one to others around the world” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485).

In 1996 Renwick and Brown developed a Quality of Life model which contains three domains of wellness: being (physical, psychological and spiritual), belonging (physical, social and community) and becoming (practical, growth, and leisure)

All of the above mentioned measures of wellness were created to evaluate the levels of wellness in certain individuals.

In the current thesis, the TestWell questionnaire was chosen to measure the level of personal wellness among the online users. The TestWell Wellness Inventory was designed by the National Wellness Institute to assess lifestyle behaviours in the general population (National Wellness Institute, 1999). It is a 50-item inventory that includes 10 subscales of 5 items within each subscale, and has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of lifestyle behaviours in the general population (Owen, 1999). The questionnaire is designed to measure the following dimensions of wellness:

- Physical Wellness,
- Nutrition,
- Self Care,
- Safety,
- Social and Environmental Wellness,
- Emotional and Sexual Wellness,
- Emotional,
- Intellectual Wellness,
- Occupational Wellness,
- Values and Beliefs.

The TestWell questionnaire was chosen for this study, because it provides data that is clear and easily comparable to the general population when it comes to analyzing the measures of wellness of the online personal development platform users.

1.1.2.Habit Formation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines habit as “A settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way, especially one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary; a settled practice, custom, and usage; a customary way or manner of acting.”

Habit formation is important in establishing a new lifestyle and changes in behaviour and is associated with success. According to many experts on behaviour change it is important for one to believe in their ability to succeed since positive initiation is the key to achieving the end goals. (Schwarzer, 2008) and (Rothman, 2000). As people develop new habits, less effort has to be put in performing simple, routine activities. Thus, fewer decisions have to be made on a conscious level. (Duhigg, 2012) This makes it possible for people to get more activities done with less time and leaves more time for creative activities. Therefore, in the case of current study it would be interesting to understand what kind of habits the users of personal development websites have formed and how it affects their lifestyle.

According to Yelnik (2002) the habit formation process occurs in the human brain with a specific loop: first, there is a cue that triggers the brain to go into automatic mode and

which habit to use. Then there is the routine, which can be physical, mental or emotional. Finally, there is a reward, which helps the brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future. It is illustrated by figure 1. In case of the habit formation on the online personal development platforms it would be interesting to determine, what if any role the sources play on the habit formation of the users.

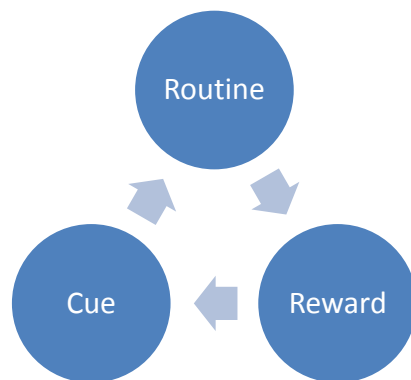


Figure 1. The Habit Loop Source: Adapted from (Duhigg, 2012)

Forming habits is essential for behavioural change in any scenario, because habitual behaviours are carried out automatically and thus are more likely to be maintained. (Lally, Wardle, & Gardner, 2011)

Based on the work by the same authors the following steps:

- Strategies that help initiate behavioural change – Preparative activities that help one stick with the positive behaviour, such as preparing lunch for work instead of eating out or bicycling to work instead of driving a car.
- Experiences of automaticity development – With gaining new positive experiences the committing to the habit gets easier with time.
- Programming effective cues to repeated performance – For the most successful performance, the new habits should be embedded in existing routines preferably to a more structured time of the day since during leisure time the habits had a tendency to “get unstuck.”

The previous theory suggests that in order to formulate sustainable and long lasting habits for behavioural change it is necessary to imbed the new habits into already

existing routine, focus on the repetition of those activities and gain strength from the positive experiences.

For the research purposes it would be interesting to see if the users of the online personal wellness platforms have gone through the above mentioned stages of behavioural change.

1.1.3.Lifestyle Segmentation Theories

Based on the definitions of Wright and Goldstucker, (1966); Schiffman and Kanuk, (2001); Solomon et al. (2009), the term “lifestyle” indicates patterns of behaviour or consumption, reflecting people’s choice. However Solomon et al., (2009), add that the lifestyle patterns are influenced by attitudes, values as well as social and economic factors.

The lifestyle of each individual is unique. Lantos (2011) determines that one’s lifestyle is influenced by their socio-cultural (e.g. social class or family lifestyle stage) and psychological factors (e.g. personality or personal values).

Lifestyle is the most holistic segmentation approach in that it tries to take into account virtually anything, and everything, that might help marketers identify and reach desirable target markets (Gonzalez and Bello, 2002). Typically, a traditional lifestyle analysis segments markets using variables from the social sciences (e.g., psychology, social psychology) in combination with (or instead of) the more commonly used demographic descriptors (e.g., age, race, sex). The underlying premise is that people who are similar in terms of such things as attitudes, opinions, motivation, and orientation, access to resources, values, and interests are also similar as consumers. As such, lifestyle segments oftentimes are defined in terms of how consumers choose to spend their time and money.

Some of the better known commercial lifestyle products available to consumer marketers are VALS2, and the Activities, Interests, and Opinions (AIO) inventory. Since the 1980’s the Consumer Culture Theory has added a more qualitative approach to the lifestyle segmentation theory. On the other hand, its applications have often been called unpractical for commercial purposes. (Arnould and Thompson, 2005)

By far the most established is the activities, interests and opinions (AIO) method for categorization of customers according to their lifestyle. With this method customers are segmented according to their activities, interests, and opinions (Wells, 1975; Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999) to understand their behaviour. An activity is an obvious action or way of spending time, such as working, shopping or exercising. An interest in something, e.g. object, event, or topic, is the degree of excitement that is linked to it, and what is considered as important or valuable (Blackwell and Miniard, 1994; Kardes et al., 2011). An opinion is a statement about other people, places, ideas or products as well as political, religious, and social beliefs. In the early attempts, psychological scales, such as measures for pathology or personality disturbance, were used, but the results were mostly disappointing, as these items are not related to everyday consumption activities and actual consumer behaviour (Solomon et al., 2009).

In the context of this research however, the goal is not to go too much in detail while determining and categorizing the lifestyle of the users in terms of market segmentation, but rather give an insight about the characteristics of the users in a more general sense in order not to overburden the study.

1.2. Online Consumer Behaviour with a Focus on Generation Y as a major online consumer

1.2.1. Consumer Behaviour

As the current thesis aims to understand the influence of online personal development platforms on the users it is relevant to introduce some main concepts of consumer behaviour focusing mainly on the online environment as this is where the research is taking place. The theory of consumer behaviour is expected to help the researcher better understand and analyse the motivations of the users regarding the online services as well as provide support in analysing their behaviours and loyalty as the aspects affecting the final influence on the users.

Consumer behaviour is defined as the behaviour that the consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using and evaluating products services and ideas which they expect will satisfy their needs. (Orji, 2013)

According to Lynn R. Kahle, Angeline G. Close (2011) consumer behaviour blends elements from psychology, sociology, social anthropology, marketing and economics. It attempts to understand the decision-making processes of buyers, both individually and in groups such as how emotions affect buying behaviour. It studies characteristics of individual consumers such as demographics and behavioural variables in an attempt to understand people's wants. It also tries to assess influences on the consumer from groups such as family, friends, sports, reference groups, and society in general.

(Constantinides, 2008) brings out the new paradigm for consumer behaviour and marketing strategy, where he points out that nowadays rather than focusing on mass production and mass communication as in the 1960-s in order to reach the modern empowered, sophisticated and individualistic customer it is necessary to win their trust.

In order to do so the same author recommends the strategy of costumer advocacy, where the consumers should be treated as equals. It is important to find a way to have a dialogue with the costumer rather than a monologue to better understand their needs.

As nowadays the internet is the main source of information for many people, it is essential for creating a trust building dialogue with the customer. According to the same research there are two main requirements for creating a well established online presence for one's business:

- The website must deliver the highest possible costumer experience. This should be of high importance to the company as the customers tend to associate the quality of the website to the quality of the products and services that the company offers. (Tractinsky et al., 2006)
- Considering the opinions and feedback of the customers is essential.

According to Lariviere et al., (2013) the social media can create a fusion of knowledge which is profitable for both the user and the company. Using social media marketing can be a considerable opportunity for small business owners due to the fact that it is more economic. (Lagrosen and Josefsson, 2011).

1.2.2. Online Consumer Behaviour

When looking at the research of Mazaheri, Richard, & Laroche, (2012) in today's online commerce the company's website has substituted the front-line staff in many occasions. Therefore the design of online content has become increasingly important for the success of the companies.

In the research conducted by of Mazaheri, Richard, & Laroche, (2012) various groups of online services were identified: Search-Based Services, Experience-Based services and Credence based services. According to the definitions, search based services can be evaluated and therefore chosen rationally before making the purchase, on the other hand, when it comes to the Experience Based services, the effects and profitability cannot be fully measured before the purchasing of the services. The Credence – based services may not be possible judge confidently even after the purchasing and consumption since. It is more difficult for consumers to obtain pre-purchase information to evaluate credence-based services than to evaluate experience- and search-based services.

It can be interpreted that consumers of experience- and credence-based services read all the information provided in the website carefully as they need as much information as possible to reduce the risk of purchasing the service. Therefore, for those two service groups, the more information provided in the web site and the more accurate and up-to-date is the data, the more time consumers would spend on the website.

Purchasing a credence-based service is much riskier than a search-based service. A higher level of customization and a more personal intervention of the service providers are needed for credence- than for search- or experience-based services (Guitinan, 1987). Therefore, consumers of credence-based services, and to some extent experience-based services, tend to rely more on their previous experience than on commercial advertisements to develop their attitudes toward the service providers.

As the online personal development services are highly customisable and consumers need to put an effort into making them work for themselves they can be possibly regarded as the credence-based services.

When it comes to designing websites for credence-based services it is important to create positive service attitudes and high level of efficiency when providing both relevant information on the service and positive or even elevating emotional connections.

Fiore et al., (2005); Richard and Chandra, (2005) support the idea that the level of interactivity on the website is a major contributor in creating trust between the consumer and the service provider as well as generating attitudes necessary for making the buying decision.

Rodgers and Sheldon (2002) bring out four categories of internet users. For the first group of individuals, the primary use of the internet is gathering information, followed by communication, exploration (general browsing) and acquisition of goods (shopping).

The following conclusions can be made from the study:

- Some Internet users enforce other users while others dismantle other users.
- Online shoppers give less value to the communication aspects of the Internet and were more interested in general browsing.

Mathwick (2001) however, divided online consumers into four segments characterized by relational norms and behaviour: the transactional community member, the socialiser, the personal connector, and the lurker.

Parsons (2002) indicated that social motivators such as communication with likeminded people, activities outside of home as well as belonging to a peer group were considerable reasons for people to shop online.

Muotinho, (2002) is concerned with the influence of factors such as culture, beliefs, values and norms on the consumer behaviour. He also adds that people turn to reference groups for their standard of judgement. Schiffman and Kanuk, (1983) have identified several reference groups influencing the consumer:

- Contactual groups - groups in which the person holds membership in. Has a positive effect on the individual since the individual accepts the group values and standards.

- Aspiration groups – the individual is not a member but would like to become one. This group also has a positive influence on the individual.
- Indirect reference groups- the individual does not interact directly with the group, but has an impact on the person's decisions.
- Disclaiming groups- the individual belongs to the group but does not approve the group's attitudes or values.
- Avoidance groups- the individual does not belong to the groups and does not approve of their attitudes or values.

The positive influence of a group can have several implications: introducing the products or services to the user, or connecting with likeminded people to share experiences.

1.2.3.Characteristics of generation Y

It is important to understand the relevance of generation Y as the main user of online platforms. It is expected that many of the characteristics common to this generation can also be adapted to the participants of the current research. According to Jones (2009) this generation is considerably more likely to use social networking sites and to create profiles than those of older generations. Lenhart (2010) focused a study on the activities surrounding this generation and agreed with Jones by concluding that 70% of Generation Y uses social networking sites and about 65% has an online profile. The generation Y has determined to be a rising contributor to world economy both as members of work force as well as consumers. This is why it is relevant to understand the characteristics of this generation. One of the most evident characteristics of generation Y is their familiarity and usage of information technology. They are currently in tertiary education or early working life, are technology efficacious, have been exposed to capitalist rule, the rise of China, high technology, globalization and the opening of trade barriers, and are the “cool consumers” of products with “image” (Heaney, 2006). They are conscious socially, culturally and environmentally; purposeful in nature; confident; require individual experiences and demand rationale due to a more sceptical nature than previous generations (Sheahan, 2005 and Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). Self-interest is a driving characteristic of this cohort; the Y Generation seeking authentic efforts from organizations to capture attention (Sheahan,

2005). Also, considered innovative and creative due to traits of informality and lack of respect for traditional procedures and practices, this generation are more likely to engage in processes which stimulate their internal motivating desires (Heaney, 2006, Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008 and Sheahan, 2005). Generation Y are considered the most consumption orientated generation of all time due to the abundance and availability of products and services (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008).

As the focus of this research is on the online personal development platforms, it is possible that a considerable amount of the user's of these websites belong to the generation Y and in order to truly understand the habits, lifestyle and personal wellness an insight has to be taken to the core of the generation's attitudes, interests as well as opinions regarding online consumption and devotion to personal development. (Jang et al., 2011)

The generation values technology, diversity and globalization, on the other hand they are in need of structure to get things done. On the other hand generation Y is more idealistic than the generation X before it. (Olof Lagrosen & Grundén, 2014) What is relevant for the service providers is the fact that people belonging to generation Y are also considered to be more demanding towards the businesses that they are working with as well as the service providers.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this group is generally very distrustful of mainstream media, and cautious of their personal safety- which may explain why earned media such as word-of-mouth, peer reviews and testimonials play such a large role in their purchasing process. (Olof Lagrosen & Grundén, 2014)

When considering the online personal development platforms it could be estimated that a considerable amount of users belong to the generation Y and therefore the characteristics in terms of values and preferences could point to important implications for the service providers. However, it should be noted that the categorization is a broad generalization and when providing services with the aim of one's personal development in mind, an individual approach towards the individual should be taken.

Vandelandotte, C., Sugiyama, T., Gardiner, P., & Owen, N. (2009) point out in their study that there is a correlation between the time spent on the internet and the level of

physical activity with individuals, in a form that the people who spend more of their leisure time on the internet, tend to also incorporate less physical activity into their leisure time. As a result of this thesis the author will be able to either confirm or overrule this position regarding the lifestyle of the respondents of the survey.

According to Lorange and Rembiszewski (2014) the generation Y consumer is a key consumer when regarding the new emerging online markets. They point out this essential group of consumers is critical towards the service provider, expects one-on-one quick communications and is interested in having a say in terms of co-creation. If innovations that the generation values and proper one-on-one communication is provided, the service providers will be able to ask higher price for their services.

The loyalty of the consumer is also an important aspect to consider as it can be expected that only individuals who have used the online personal development platforms for some time will be able to benefit most from them. Allen and Rao (2000:8) suggest that loyalty may have two primary dimensions: affective and rational. The authors further state that, the affective dimension of loyalty has emotional underpinnings and involves human interaction. On the other hand the cognitive dimension of loyalty includes evaluations of the business relationship that involve price, proximity, timeliness, and so on”.

Generation X should also be mentioned here as an emerging consumer segment due to the fact that in some societies the population is aging. According to Lorange and Rembiszewski, (2014) Generation X values health, convenience and more affordable prices. Therefore, it should be mentioned that in some wellness dimensions that focus on physical and mental wellness, there should be a market for this generation as well, but this is not the focus in the online context. In conclusion during this research the Generation Y is expected to be the largest target market and the characteristics of this generation will be presented as most relevant.

1.3. Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework draws on theory, research, and experience, and examines the relationship among constructs and ideas. It provides the theoretical and methodological bases for development o the study and analysis of findings. The conceptual framework presents the logic behind the development of the study and brings together all the aspects from the literature review to understand the concepts and theories that will be used when analysing and making conclusions regarding the research question.

As presented in Figure 2 the research question has three levels, the influence of online personal development websites is researched from the personal wellness, habits and lifestyle point of view. The theories from each level that will be used in the data analysis are also described. Since the community under research is an online community consisting mainly of women it is relevant to understand how these aspects influence the user as well. It might be possible that these factors make the online user different from other user.

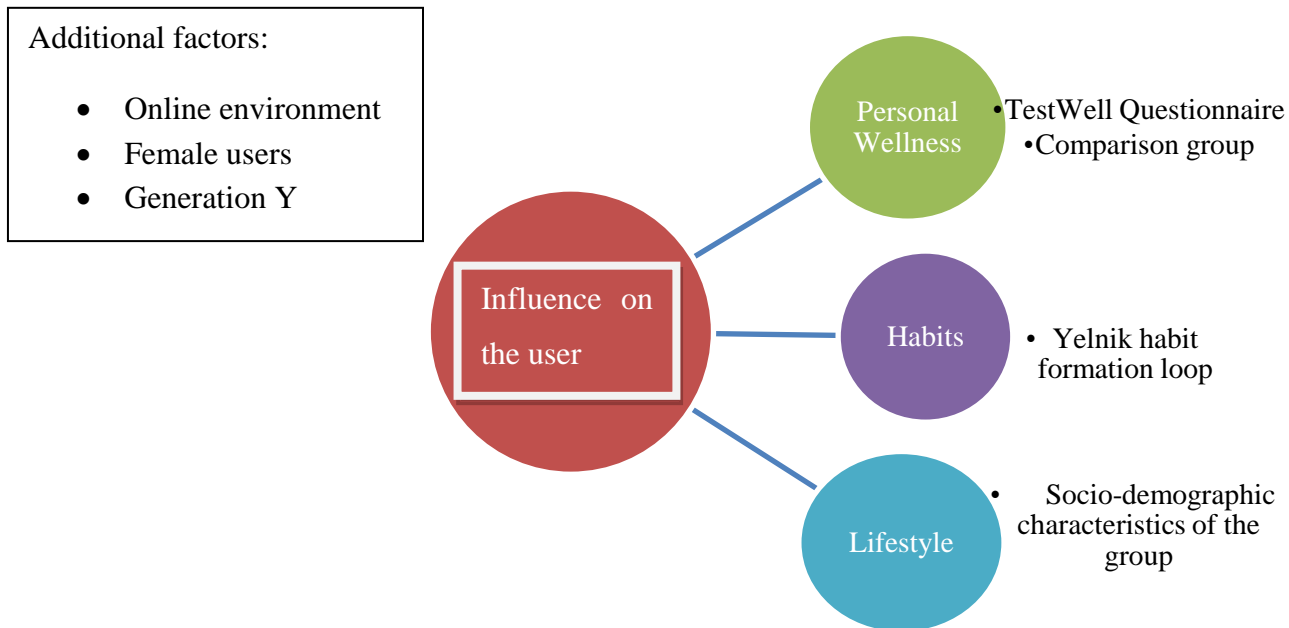


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the study. Source: compiled by the author.

Relying on the definitions provided above it can be concluded that achieving a good level of personal wellness in different dimensions is the goal of the personal development platform users. In order to achieve that, they incorporate routines and activities into their everyday life. After some repetition of routines, they become habits,

activities that are automatically repeated without much thought. A set of various habits forms a lifestyle which in addition to habits includes also a set of values and beliefs that are bound to ensure the personal wellness of the platform user (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Relationship between the research concepts

The following section gives an overview of the online personal development platforms and provides an understanding of the main thematic focus regarding various dimensions of wellness. It also defines the phrase “personal development” in the context of this thesis. The same dimensions are also used in the TestWell questionnaire. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Online Personal Development Platforms

Website	Topic focus	Dimensions of wellness
kriscarr.com	The service provider is known for being a cancer survivor who has shared her story publicly in a form of a documentary. She also has created a community at my.crazysexylife.com, where tens of thousands of people have gained inspiration and emotional support.	Physical Wellness Nutrition Emotional Wellness
gabbyb.tv	A network for entrepreneurial women herfuture.com, in addition to the spiritual growth provided by her books, life lessons and meditations.	Spiritual Wellness Emotional Wellness
mentorschannel.com	A community for online meditations delivered by renowned professionals	Spiritual Wellness Social Wellness

Table 1 continued

Website	Topic focus	Dimensions of wellness
daniellelaporte.com	Setting goals in reaching what they desire.	Emotional Wellness Spiritual Wellness Occupational Wellness
foodmatters.tv	Shares health and food related documentaries, recopies and other videos, mostly; it is a source of gaining knowledge and information.	Physical Wellness Nutrition Intellectual Wellness Social Wellness Environmental Wellness
juicemaster.com	Provides information on the benefits on juicing in the treatment of chronic diseases.	Physical Wellness Nutrition Intellectual Wellness
marieforleo.com	An inspiring platform for female entrepreneurs providing them with support for business development.	Occupational Wellness Spiritual Wellness Social Wellness

Source: Compiled by the author.

The online personal development platforms were chosen taking into consideration the fact that, they would have a considerable following with more than 100 000 Facebook fans and YouTube channel subscribers. It was intended that the platforms cover a wide range of personal wellness dimensions with their main products and services in order to look into a diverse group of users as well as their habits and lifestyle. All the platforms involved in this study are in English language and it is therefore expected to represent the specific cultural background and value systems of the Anglo-Saxon world. According to Hofstede (1986) the Anglo Saxon culture is considered to have a small

power distance. The study by previous author Hofstede confirms that individuals from that cultural background are more open to learning things online. It shall also be noted that many of the approached respondents were owners of small businesses. In future studies it would be interesting to see how the usage of online personal development platforms differs in other cultures.

It is also important to define the phrase “personal development” in the context of this study. Aubrey (2010) argues that personal development includes activities that improve awareness and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and facilitate employability, enhance quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations. The concept is not limited to self-help but includes formal and informal activities for developing others in roles such as teacher, guide, counselor, manager, life coach or mentor. (Lawson and Myers, 2011).

The personal development industry can be divided into two categories: the business to consumer market, which includes books, courses and techniques such as fitness, beauty, weight loss, but also yoga, martial arts and meditation. Some of the products and services included in the practice include books, motivational speeches, e-learning programs, workshops, individual counselling, life-coaching and time management. (Lawson and Myers, 2011).

Similar services are also provided in group settings on a business to business level as companies are more eager to invest in the personal development of its employees.

In the current thesis the author focused on the business to consumer relationships and the business to business dynamics could be discussed and researched in further studies.

It is evident, that even though the goal of the service providers is to help their consumer live a better life, they are also commercial businesses and therefore, when it comes to health and wellness, each user should be cautious before making any purchases or using products and when in doubt it is recommended to consult with a doctor.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationships between content provided by the online personal development websites and the effects it has on the users' personal wellness, habits and lifestyle in order to better understand the profile of the user and give insights to the industry professionals. This chapter will provide detailed information about the research paradigm and methodology. It describes and justifies the selection of scope, sampling, data collection and analysis methods that are implied in this study. The chapter also covers the issues of trustworthiness and reliability of the dissertation.

2.1. Assumptions and Research Development

The thesis applies mixed methods to address the research question. The issue of investigating the user's habits and lifestyle on a personal level needs subjective approach because the author is interested in the individual experience of each respondent in the sample, it is justified to use qualitative research paradigm when researching the topics of habits and lifestyle. This statement is found to be supported by (Silverman, 2009), (Flick, 2013) and (Rageh, Melewar, & Woodside, 2013).

On the other hand, since there were considerable high quality tests developed for measuring the different dimensions of personal wellness, a quantitative approach was used in form of a survey to reach this aim of the study. Using the standardized test also made it possible to compare the results of the survey to a group among the general population and thus give more meaning to the study.

Since the topic is tightly related to online environment the principles of netnography research strategy were used to build a framework for the study.

When calculating the size of the population of the numbers of followers on the Facebook was used. The total number of the followers on the 7 main sites was 2 595 000 people. The appropriate margin of error for the study was determined to be $\pm 5\%$, and the confidence level of the accuracy of the results being representative for the entire population should be 95%.

When it comes to the sample size of the content analysis that will be conducted on the chosen web pages a proportional amount of comments/ online content was analyzed, taking into account that all respondents should have used the products and/or services of the website. It was also expected that the responses were divided proportionally among the different websites.

As the target group for the research is quite specific, and the personal information of all online personal development platform users was not available to the author, nonprobability sampling was used as the individuals were approached via personal e-mails. The author is aware that due to the nonprobability sampling method no too broad generalizations can be made using the gathered data.

2.2. Research Methods

The main aim of the research is to investigate the role of the online self-development services and tools in the increasing personal wellness levels for the users. As this was done by collecting primary data from the potential users and experienced users, it also becomes possible to provide some insight for the industry professionals about the specific customer behavioural and lifestyle aspects of the users to further develop the products in the market.

Therefore, the aims of the research are as follows:

1. Investigating the influence of the online self-development online platforms on the users' personal wellness.
2. Identification of the online service specific consumer behavioural and lifestyle patterns.
3. Providing insights of the segment specific characteristics for the service providers.

The sampling as well as the research methods used to achieve the thesis objectives are described below. The main framework for researching the topic will be netnography. Netnography was first defined by Robert Kozinets as a process or research methodology, and as a "new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research

techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications. (Rageh et al., 2013)

The netnography approach has been proven to work well in the contexts of marketing and consumer behaviour (Robert V Kozinets, 2010), as the given thesis relies mostly on the consumer behaviour theory, the netnographic framework is good for organizing the work processes.

The following paragraphs provide an understanding of the theoretical and practical grounds used in this thesis. A netnography research project follows a specific step by step protocol:

1. Definition of research questions, social sites or topics to investigate,
2. Community selection and selection – what are the main parameters for the online self-development platforms chosen for investigation,
3. Community participant observation (engagement, immersion) and data collection procedures,
4. Data analysis and interpretation of data and
5. Writing and reporting research findings and/or theoretical policy implications of the study.

The protocol is adapted from (RV Kozinets, 2010) According to Kozinets, the netnography framework provides rich and contextual data as it is often used for marketing research purposes in the corporate setting, it is also important to note that it is fast and relatively cheap compared to other market research models. The main method of data collection is online content analysis. It can be considered rather unobtrusive, since the researcher can remain ‘invisible’ to the user. It is important to understand that netnography is not simply web surfing and requires a high level of systematic approach in data collection and analysis.

When it comes to data collection methods several approaches can be used to achieve the aims of the research. Methods such as analysing the historic postings is possible, however discussions and topics can also be started by the researcher if relevant, online

(Skype) interviews and participant surveys can also be developed, however, as there is a vast amount of data available researchers field notes should also be considered while making conclusions regarding the collected data.

In the thesis the author intends to use mostly to analyse the comments of the users on the above named websites granted that there is access to vast amounts of data. In order to gain further insights to the topics the author participated as starting discussions in the Facebook groups and/or commentary sections of the websites to make sure that relevant information is gained and the conclusions regarding the research question can be made.

Once messages that are directly related to the given research questions were identified, the data was analyzed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. Nvivo trial is freely downloadable for a trial period of 30 days and the major part of data analysis was done within this time.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

For the purpose of data collection methods such as online survey and content analysis were used.

An online survey offers many attractions to those who adopt it. This approach to data collection, especially the use of questionnaires, enables data to be collected about relatively large numbers of people. Because data is collected about the same characteristics from multiple respondents, it allows us to compare respondents. The data was suitable for enumeration, facilitating quantitative analysis. The availability of computer software for data input and statistical analysis have greatly assisted this. When the respondents comprise a representative probability sample it is possible to generalise from them to the entire population. Anyhow, with the application of nonprobability sampling, the author was aware that no big generalizations can be made with this sample. Even the modest goal of the descriptive survey ensures the collection of relevant data on topics of interest and is a necessary stage in the progress of sociological investigation. Another commendable feature of the social survey is that the research process is relatively transparent. Each stage of the research design may be visible and can be replicated by other researchers as a check on the reliability of the data or results. (Brewer, 2014)

The online survey was conducted over the period of 13th March until 11th April 2015 and had 101 respondents.

Altogether 502 personal e-mails (e-mail, Facebook or online community profile, YouTube) were sent out. 29 online service providers were contacted with a request to spread the survey link with their followers who remain in the target group of the study. In addition 43 links were distributed in online communities and forum discussions in a group setting. Therefore over the period of 15.03.15 - 11.04.15 574 pleas for the response of the survey were sent out and 92 responses were gathered. It can be mentioned that the personal messages proved to be more efficient in gathering responses resulting in around 85% of the overall responses even though in group settings one link to the survey was available to a larger number of individuals (communities including 80-3500 members).

The overall response rate to the survey was accordingly 14.1%. This number is consistent with the works of Lozar Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, and Vehovar (2008), which show in a meta-analysis of 24 experimental studies that, on average, traditional survey methods lead to 11% higher response rates than web-based survey methods. Numerous comparative studies have compared web and mail survey modes, and the findings from these studies have been inconsistent.. The meta-analysis conducted by Lozar Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, and Vehovar (2008), showed that web survey modes generally have lower response rates (about 10% lower on the average) than mail survey modes.

The initial goal was to gather at least 386 responses, however, using the online data collection method it would have taken an increased amount of time up to one month increased time in dealing with the data collection which did not fit in the timeline provided for the dissertation. The author is aware that due to the low number of responses from the survey, which make up only a fraction of the population, no big generalisations can be made about the lifestyle and habits of the population. However, this study still remains to be insightful and useful in an exploratory manner to estimate the influence of online personal development platforms on the user's' personal wellness, habits and lifestyle.

The survey was targeted to the users of online personal development platform users. The respondents were asked to answer to 22 questions regarding internet usage and level of personal wellness. The TestWell questionnaire was used to measure the levels of personal wellness in 10 different categories each category containing 5 questions. Each question has possible answers on a scale from 1 to 5 (Never or almost never to always or almost always.)

A procedure of content analysis was undertaken to determine how the usage of different online personal development platforms has influenced the level of personal wellness of the users. For this 525 comments and user testimonies from 7 websites included in this study. Deductive approach was used in the coding process relying on a coding scheme. (See Appendix 1.)

In case the user had determined that using of the online services and/or products has had some kind of a change in their personal wellness, codes described in Appendix 1 were used in order to understand in which dimension the influence had occurred

The aim of the coding was to determine:

- When using the online products/services how has it changed the thinking/mindset/ outlook on life?
- How has using the websites changed their habits and lifestyle? What specific changes have they made thanks to the products/services?
- Which dimension of wellness has been affected?
- What kind of services products are they using?

The comments were then categorised to provide insight to understand the overall user profile of the above named websites.

In conclusion the research uses mixed methods approach; the research strategy was put together using the theoretical background of netnography. Both primary and secondary data was used to answer the research question. Firstly, an online survey was conducted to measure the level of personal wellness among the online personal development website users. The data was analyzed using basic statistics and comparisons were made with a comparison group in order to add some perspective to the research. Then

secondary data was analyzed using coding scheme described in Appendix 1. Computer assisted data analysis software NVivo was used to make this process smoother and more reliable.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The following chapter gives an overview of the results and discusses the implications with the aim of answering the research question and finding out how the usage of online personal development platforms influences the users' levels of personal wellness in various dimensions compared to the general public.

Firstly, the aim of the online survey was to understand which websites the respondents were using, how extensive was their usage and how would they evaluate their experience. It was found out not surprisingly, that the respondents are relatively active web users with the most activity on social networking (91%) but also news (18%) and entertainment (19%). On the other hand the educational and personal development/spirituality sites were also popular among respondents, with 46% and 72% of respondents using them on a regular basis.

76% of the respondents use the websites at least once per week for new content. Another 17% identify to using the websites 2 or 3 times per month which is still relatively often. It can be said that this is the part of their self development lifestyle.

On average, the respondent uses the online platforms for 57 minutes per day each week. It is a considerable amount of time and it is going to have an impact on one's habits and lifestyle. Most of the respondents (76%) use one or more of the websites once or more per week as shown on figure 3.

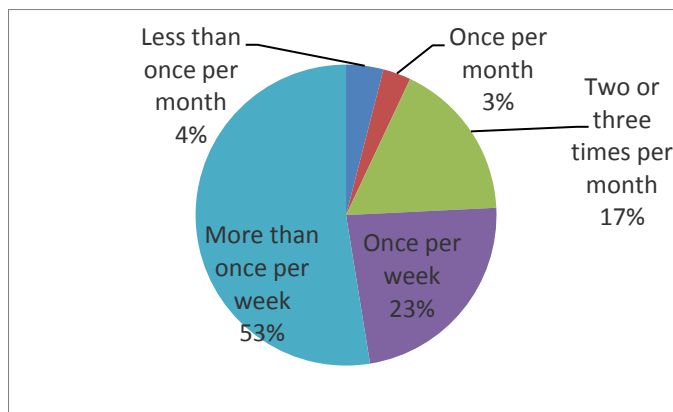


Figure 4. Frequency of website visits

Among the respondents the most popular self development websites included in this study are marieforleo.com and gabbyb.tv both being regularly used by 64% of the respondents. Following are kriscarr.com and daniellelaporte.com with 33% and 34% of regular users. Websites such as foodmatters.tv (14%), mentorschannel.com and juicemaster.com (both 4%) appear to be less used by the survey respondents.

77% of the respondents have used the website for less than 3 years. 22% of the respondents have used the websites for 3-5 years.

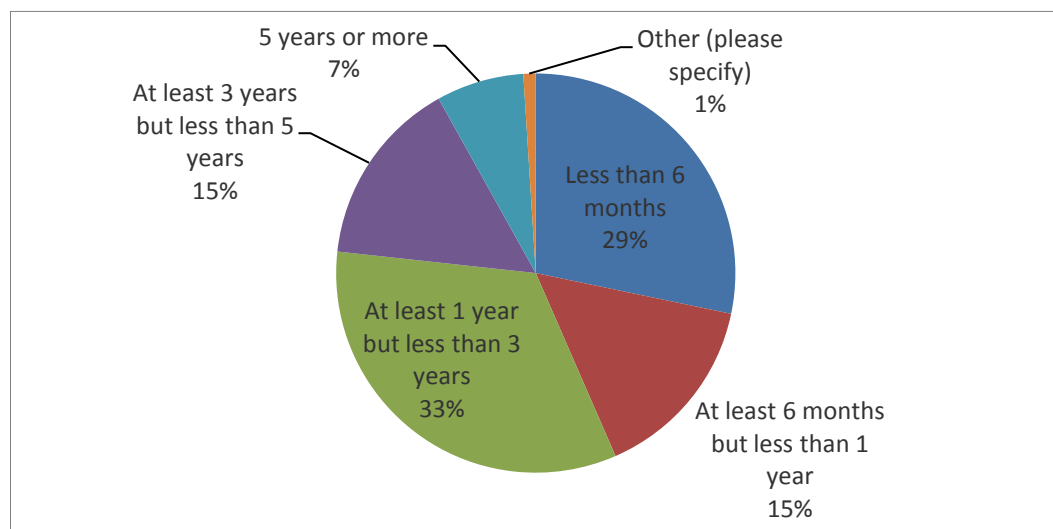


Figure 5. Period of website usage

It can also be said that the users are generally satisfied with the content provided on the websites, because 83% of the respondents are extremely likely or very likely to recommend it to their friends. (See Figure 5.)

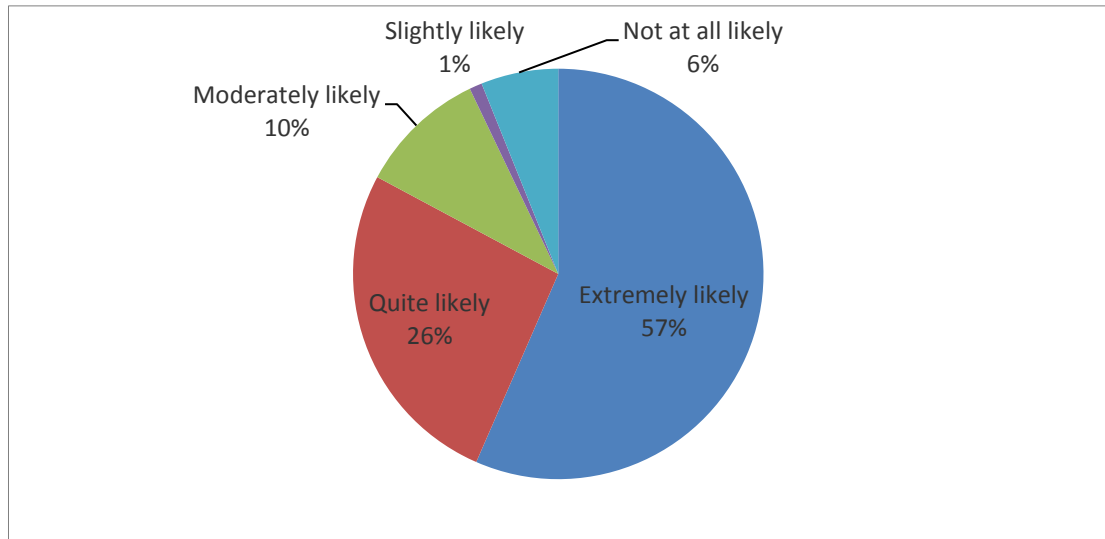


Figure 6 Likelihood of recommendation

Overall the respondents are frequent web users using the online personal development sites on a weekly basis; therefore it can be expected to have an impact on their habits and lifestyle.

When coming to the socio-demographic information, 93% of the respondents were female. This is expected, since many of the platforms are targeted at women (herfuture.com, marieforleo.com) also the fact that in general women are more likely to take part in surveys should be considered. Anyhow, it is safe to assume that the majority of users on the self development online platforms are indeed women.

The average age of the respondent is 35, 7 years. 69% of the respondents are 40 years or younger. The individuals born between the years 1981 and 1997 that belong to the generation Y (millennials) make up 57% of the respondents. This is the generation that is associated with the biggest online presence. (See figure 6.)

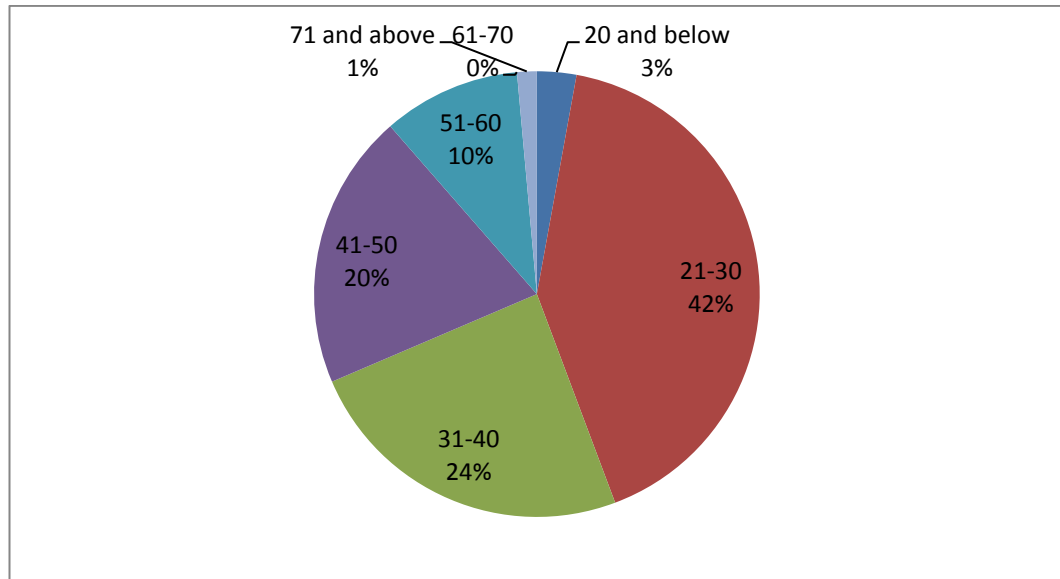


Figure 7. Age of respondent

64% of the respondents have a bachelor degree or higher level of education. Since a considerable amount of respondents are under the age of 25 then the level of education tends to get even higher by years. With an additional 30% have attended some college and have an associate degree or no degree yet. In the case of the young people acquiring a college degree the percentage of respondents with higher education could rise up to 94%. (See figure 7.)

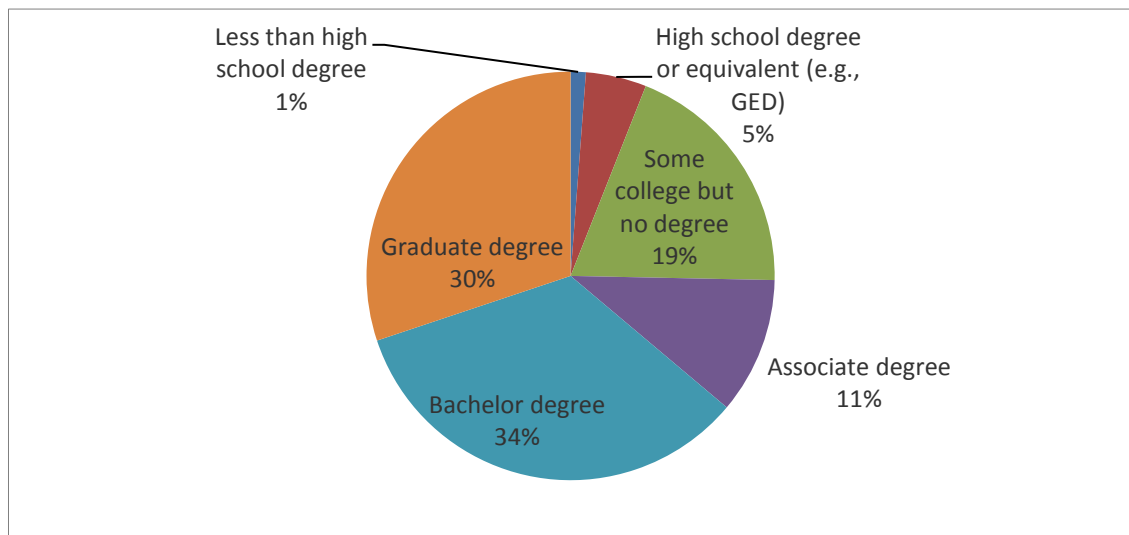


Figure 8 Educational level of the respondent

91% of the respondents work either full time or part time. 3% are currently unemployed and looking for work The general unemployment rate in USA in April 2015 was 5, 5%

(United States Census Bureau www.census.gov) which is higher than stated among the respondents of the study. However if a person is unemployed and does not want to mention it in the study, the results may not be completely accurate. It would also be interesting to know which percent of the people are self-employed since in the content analysis it was found out that many users of the website claim to have their own business.

When analysing the results of the 50-question TestWell questionnaire the results were compared to the results of a general sample from www.testwell.org. The comparison group was much more evenly distributed regarding gender, consisting 52% of male (107) respondents opposed to 6% in the sample group (5). The groups also differ in terms of age distribution, while the respondents of this research are younger; the age groups are more evenly distributed within the sample group. 50% of the comparison group members were of age 40 or below, while in the sample group 69% were 40 or younger. Demographic information regarding the comparison group was obtained from the website of National Wellness Institute www.testwell.org.

The comparison shows that the overall level of wellness of the respondents is higher in every dimension besides the level of physical wellness compared to the comparison group. For the respondents, the highest scores were in the dimensions of emotional and sexual wellness (4.56), values and beliefs (4.52) and safety (4.49). The lowest were scores in self care (3.84) and intellectual wellness (3.93). The results presented in figure 8. indicate the differences between the survey respondents and the comparison group.

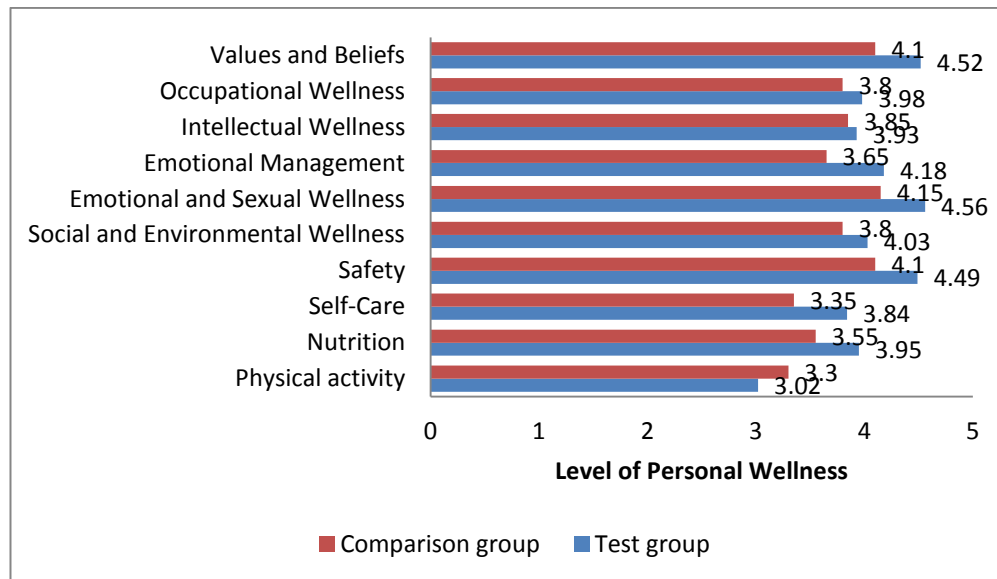


Figure 9. Differences between the survey respondents and comparison group.

It can be seen that the survey respondents surpass the comparison group in every dimension of wellness except for the physical activity dimension. It does not indicate, that thanks to the positive influence of the personal development websites, the level of personal wellness of its users has increased so much compared to the comparison group, rather it is probable that people who are already more healthy and make more conscious decisions about their habits and lifestyle will use the websites on a regular basis. Table 2 gives an understanding of the relative differences in wellness dimensions among the two groups.

Table 2 Dimensions of Personal Wellness

Dimension of wellness	Test group mean	Comparison group mean	Difference (%)
Physical activity	3,02	3,3	-8,5
Nutrition	3,95	3,55	10,13
Self-Care	3,84	3,35	12,76
Safety	4,49	4,1	8,69
Social and Environmental Wellness	4,03	3,8	5,71
Emotional and Sexual Wellness	4,56	4,15	8,99
Emotional Management	4,18	3,65	12,68
Intellectual Wellness	3,93	3,85	2,04
Occupational Wellness	3,98	3,8	4,52
Values and Beliefs	4,52	4,1	9,29
Total	4,05	3,77	6,91

Source: Compiled by the author.

The National Wellness Institute also provides a guide to scale the results. According to the institute, the scores equal or higher than 4 are considered excellent, 3.9-3 good results and below 3 is said to be an indicator that the individual needs to focus on improving said dimension of wellness. This signifies that the level of personal wellness among online personal development platform users – 4.05 - can be considered excellent.

Overall the level of wellness among the survey respondents is 6.91% higher than that of the comparison group. The reason for the difference is yet to be determined.

The purpose of the content analysis was to determine how using the online personal wellness websites has influenced the users on different levels of wellness. When applying the coding scheme described in Appendix 2 to all of the comments, conclusions in were made:

Overall, the themes of physical wellness (added physical activity, yoga practice, running) where used in the in 5 sources 34 times. The theme of nutrition or change in eating habits was mentioned in 4 sources 62 times. Often this was related to remission of serious illness through the knowledge and support group gained from the websites 3 sources 123 times. The topic of emotional wellness included being inspired or general sense of uplifted mood was brought out in 7 souses 385 times. The improvement in occupational wellness either in terms of starting one's own business and expanding revenue or establishing a better work life balance was mentioned in 7 sources 287 times. Appendix 4 gives an overview of all the major themes found during the content analysis.

It has to be mentioned that generally the websites that were analyzed in the course of this study are all quite different and focusing on different aspects of one's wellness. It cannot be made clear if the usage of the websites is making people more focused on their wellness as many people mentioned in their feedback that their healthy and balanced lifestyle led them to find online platforms that support their habits and lifestyle choices.

In the following chapter, insights to the proposed consumer lifestyle are provided.

The average age of the respondent of the survey is 36 years; however people who use the websites are generally computer literate and use the internet for gathering information, education and self development. This feature is inherent to the Generation Y (aged between 34 and 18 in 2015). This population also makes up 58% of the respondents of the survey.

Most of the respondents of the survey go online for content on business development, positive character development, interpersonal relationships and one's personal spiritual practice. Online community of likeminded individuals also is a big motivator for visiting named sites. Less people are looking for general positive uplifting emotions, support in a case of health issues and diet tips.

As on average, the respondent uses the online platforms for 57 minutes per day each week it is a considerable amount of time and it is going to have an impact on one's habits and lifestyle.

It is also discovered, that 58% of the respondents are extremely likely to recommend the websites to their friends. Altogether 93% of the respondents are likely to make the recommendation. The fact that the respondent is likely to recommend the content of the website shows that they are relatively satisfied with the content and the impact that the website has had on their life therefore they are ready to promote it among their friends as well.

When compared to the general USA population then the respondent of the survey - the user of the online personal development platforms has higher education with more than 50% more bachelor degrees and 37% more graduate degrees. It supports the general idea, that people with higher level of education are more concerned with their general health and level of wellness. Comparisons on educational level between the USA general population and the respondents are provided in table 3.

Table 3. Level of Education in Both Groups

Level of education	Respondents of the survey	General population* USA
Less than a High school degree	1%	11%
High School degree or equivalent	5%	31%
Some College but no degree	19%	19%
Associate degree	12%	10%
Bachelor degree	36%	19%
Graduate degree	27%	10%

*Aged 18 and above. Source: <http://www.census.gov/> 12.04.15, as well as the author's survey

Even though the country of residence was not included in the questionnaire, some users of online communities had marked it in their profiles, therefore rough estimations can be made from the online community herfuture.com user profiles that 62% of the users are from the USA, 27% from Australia, 5% from Canada, 4% from United Kingdom and 4% from other countries. It is to be expected that the majority of users are from English speaking countries since the content of the platforms is in English. For this reason the statistical information of the USA population is used when making comparisons.

It has to be mentioned that even though there are around 93 000 registered users on the online communities of herfuture.com and my.crazyxexylife.com some of the accounts are not active and are used mostly to promote different supplements and body

enhancement products. These profiles make up to approximately 10 to 15 % of all the profiles.

When analysing the comments on the personal development websites, it became evident that when provided the right environment the users are eager to share their personal experiences and discuss how said websites or relevant products such as books and/or retreats provided by the service provider have changed their life or added to different dimensions of wellness. It is of course clear that the knowledge gained from online comments should be considered subjective and not 100% reliable. For example the respondent may in fact state that she has rooted a new behaviour, but if she subsides from it a few days or weeks later she is less likely to report it online. Therefore, the results that might seem permanent in the comment might turn out to be temporary.

Since all of the online platforms included in this study are relevantly different from each other they also entail different habit as well as lifestyle changes in users.

It was unexpected to identify many wellness coaches among the respondents. It is questionable if everyone has enough market shares to further grow and develop their business in a sustainable way. Based on the number of Facebook followers the average size of the entrepreneur's client base is between 100-500 - small company in the bigger scale. Is it that they have not reached the tipping point yet with their business, like the other communities in the research have, or is it that the as the business of lifestyle coaching is a personal and intimate business and works better in a smaller format. The small business owners use the online platforms as a source of personal development as well as good reference for their customers.

3.2. Discussion

The following chapter provides an in depth interpretation, analysis and synthesis of the results. It discusses the issues of trustworthiness as well as the reasoning behind unexpected results. This section also restates the study's limitations and discusses transferability of findings to broader populations or other settings and conditions. This chapter synthesizes and discusses the results in light of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. Overall, this chapter reflects thoroughly on the study's findings, and the practical and theoretical implications thereof.

When it comes to the user's level of personal wellness when measured with the TestWell standardized questionnaire, (See Appendix 4.) it gave the opportunity to compare the results to the comparison group that includes people who have answered previously to the National Wellness Institute administrated tests. As discussed in the previous section the results in different personal wellness dimensions showed that the respondents had overall higher rates in each dimension with the exception of physical wellness. This finding is supported by Vandelanotte, C., Sugiyama, T., Gardiner, P., & Owen, N. (2009), who found a correlation with the extended usage of internet during the leisure time and high body mass index.

Regarding the habit formation and behavioural change, the respondents pointed out that possessing positive and healthy habits and attitude is important to them. It was also mentioned that the websites alone cannot make a habit persist in their life, but rather people who are interested in having a change in their habits and lifestyle are looking for platforms to achieve that goal. Considering this finding, it can be proposed that the online platforms in this study play a role of inspiring individuals for continuous action in improving their lifestyle. The role of inspiration can be explained using the model of Yelnik (2002) where the role of the online self-development websites could be described as the "Cue" which reminds the users of the benefits and rewards they will get in terms of improved quality of life when adapting to a routine of activities to bring behavioural change and finally desired results in personal development and possibly higher level of personal wellness in various dimensions. This approach is also supported by (Lally, Wardle, & Gardner, 2011) who point out that when routines are performed on an automated level, then the activities are more likely to stick and bring desired results in the long run.

The influence of habit change is perhaps the most evident in the field of personal business development where the users of specific products on marieforleo.com have claimed to increase the bottom line of their business by a considerable amount by implementing some behavioural changes in marketing and decision making processes. See Appendix 2 for examples.

When it comes to creating a consumer profile based on the findings of the study, it should be firstly noted that due to the nonprobability sampling as well as relatively small number of respondents, no big generalizations can be made regarding the consumers or the segmentation of costumers. Therefore, the methods of lifestyle segmentation methods such as traditional lifestyle segmentation or Consumer Culture Theory were not applied here. However, it was found that the results correspond to several concepts and ideas discussed previously in the first chapter of this thesis.

The prior estimate, that most of the users of the online personal development websites are female, was most probably confirmed as 93% of the respondents were indeed female. When gathering secondary data from the service providers' motivations, the products and services on those personal development websites are also targeted at female consumers. It would be interesting to find out in further research, if the target groups also follow the categorization of Mazaheri, Richard, & Laroche, (2012) where they brought out different categories of online costumers regarding their motivation as well as behaviour when making the purchase. According to the definition it could be assumed that the online personal development platform belong to the group of credence-based service providers.

Even though the majority of the respondents agreed that they would recommend the website to their friend (83%) and the users are happy with the services provided, the thesis was not able to gather more detailed information in order to categorize the services using the model proposed by Mazaheri, Richard, & Laroche, (2012). However, it is recommended for the service providers to precede further research in this field in order to have a more precise positioning of their services on the market.

Also, it was confirmed that a large group of the users belong to the generation Y and therefore, possibly share some of the characteristics that are omitted to this specific demographic. One interesting parallel that can be seen is the fact that as pointed out by (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008), is that the generation Y can be seen as considerably critical towards the service providers and are more trusting of word-of mouth marketing and peer reviews online when making purchasing decisions. Therefore, the service

providers should take this into consideration when constructing their marketing activities. In addition, the fact that the members of the generation Y prefer to be in immediate contact with the service provider via comments, feedback forms and other mediums was confirmed. It is in fact relevant to the service providers as they can encourage the users to share their opinion for the further development of the websites and involve the users in the process of co-creation.

In addition the generation has a general distrust of large corporations and it seems like those online companies have largely taken it into consideration when marketing themselves on the premise of the individual standing behind the brand. This requires the service provider him/herself to be a role model in terms of personal development and personal wellness as well as retaining a close connection with their users to guarantee reliability and high quality customer service.

Therefore, it can be said that it is important for the customers to know the individual behind the service in order to trust them and later buy products from them. It is evident that most of the service providers in this study understand the importance of the level of brand personality and have applied it in their business. The business has the face as well as first name of the service provider as the users refer to them often in first name basis rather than communicating with an anonymous company. As Porterfield (2015) points out the people of the new generation are looking for authentic connections, so that they can trust the service provider and have a “personal relationship” rather than the interaction between the consumer and service provider. According to the findings of the research the companies have adapted well to this aspect and therefore have won the trust of their consumers. The idea is also supported by Fiore et al., (2005); Richard and Chandra, (2005) who discuss that trust and credibility are extremely important for the success of such businesses.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the current study reviled the importance of the aspect of community when it comes to the online platforms. Almost 70% of the analyzed comments mentioned the words “community” and “communication with likeminded individuals” when describing the motivations and influence the websites have had on

their lives. (For examples see Appendix 2.) The characteristics of online consumers proposed by Rodgers and Sheldon (2002) support this finding that the motivation for some online consumers is the community and communication with likeminded individuals as opposed to the ones who use internet for general browsing and simple purchasing of goods. According to this classification the respondents of the survey belong to the prior group of internet users. Regarding the implications to the service provider it gives the possibility to further enhance environments that make it possible for the individuals to communicate with each other, share ideas and opinions about the products as well as support each other on the road of improving their lives.

Some of the online environments such as herfuture.com – operated by Gabrielle Bernstein - and my.crazysexylife.com – operated by Kris Carr – already exist, but further development of the social media and support group sections of the websites should be done as this function of the platforms has appeared to be very important for the users in terms of motivation for habit creation as well as behavioural change.

In addition, it was learned from the research, that the respondents of the survey were willingly ready to belong to the online communities and accepting the beliefs and values of the group, thus making it likely for them to belong to the contractual group members, who were classified by Schiffman and Kanuk, (1983) as individuals who have a membership to a group and share the values and beliefs of the same group.

Consumer loyalty is an important issue regarding the online personal wellness platforms. As mentioned by Allen and Rao (2000:8) it becomes evident that in the case of this thesis the affective loyalty category proposed by the above mentioned authors is relevant since consuming online personal wellness services is often an emotional decision as described by the users in the reviewed comments. It is clear that people who use the websites on a regular basis are bound to benefit from them on a higher level. However, still all services are recommended to be used in moderation since excessive use of information technology as well as lack of physical activity and face to face communication can have a negative effect on the users' personal wellness. (Cheng, Liang, & Tsai, 2015)

The research question is set to identify the influence of online personal development platforms on the individuals' lifestyle. The lifestyle aspect could be defined and applied from the standpoint of market segmentation. In fact, several approaches to lifestyle segmentation theory, such as Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and more traditional methods like Attitudes, Interests, and Opinions (Wells, 1975; Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999) were discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. However, in the scope of this master thesis, the author did not see it possible to address the issue of consumer segmentation based on lifestyle, as it would have required an additional amount of time for data collection which was not available at the time. Nevertheless, the current research provides an insight to some of the factors in the online personal development platform users' lifestyles and is a good starting point for developing further studies in the field of lifestyle segmentation.

Conclusion

The dissertation consists of three parts. The first part gives a theoretical overview of the concepts and frameworks used to conduct the analysis. The second part of the thesis includes a detailed description and justification of research strategy, data collection and analysis methods. The third part of the paper presents the major results of the research, puts it into context with previous studies and theoretical background and later gives further suggestions for the development of online personal development websites both from the users' and service provider's point of view. Finally it also provides insights and suggestions for further research.

This master thesis was successful to identify several ways how online personal development platforms influence the users' overall level of wellness. The information was gained through an online survey targeted at the users as well as the content analysis of online comments, where the users themselves had previously mentioned how their lifestyle, habits or general state of wellness has been influenced by the paid and complementary content of the platforms.

According to the evaluation criteria of the National Wellness Institute the level of personal wellness among the online personal development platform users can be considered excellent.

The users were quick to mention that the website alone is not going to help make major changes in anyone's life but is a great source of information and supportive communities for people who already have an intrinsic motivation to make the change.

The evidence supported that the average level of personal wellness is higher among the respondents of the survey compared to the general population, however, the fact that this is the cause of only using online personal development platforms is highly unlikely and if it is found to be necessary to study further a longitudinal study would be a suitable way to determine the relationship more clearly.

The influence on users' habits was expressed in the form of new routines in physical activity, mental patterns, spiritual practices, nutrition choices and communication decisions that the users implement to their lives on a daily basis. Therefore it is evident,

that they are working towards improving their level of personal wellness in various dimensions and- with every small action- moving closer to living their best lives. It is evident from the research that regarding the habit formation cycle provided by (Duhigg, 2012), it can be said that the content on the websites act as cues in the habit loop cycle providing a trigger for users to establish new routines to begin changes in habits and later in lifestyle.

The study also has several possible limitations. Firstly, when adopting a quantitative research design, a failure to use a probability sampling technique significantly limits the ability to make broader generalisations from the results. An online survey was chosen as a way of data collection even though according to (Hughes, 2012) it is expected that the online surveys have a lower response rate compared to mail or in-person surveys, the author believes that it is the best way to reach the target group of this research since they are online anyway. Still as with any survey it should be taken into consideration that there is a possibility of non-response bias having an effect on the final results of this study.

Another limitation is met when it comes to the detail in which the lifestyle portion of the research question was explored in the study, hence in terms of lifestyle segmentation theory, the consumers of online personal wellness were not divided into consumer groups, the main reason being this would given a far too wide scope which was not practical when conducting a master's thesis.

The findings of this research make it possible to give suggestions to both the users as well as the service providers connected with the online personal development platforms.

Firstly, for the users, it is evident that:

1. The use of the personal development site content is extensive- respondent average of 57 minutes per day, which from the point of view of internet consumption is a risk factor for the level of personal wellness.
2. Usage of the online personal development websites does not guarantee a higher level of personal wellness, but rather inspires and motivates users to take action in their life.

For the service providers the main findings suggest that:

1. The main motivations for the users to visit the online platform include inspiration, higher level of motivation as well as support from the online community. Some service providers already have pinpointed on this aspect, but the possibilities for communication and shared experiences among the users could be further developed. It could be added that even, the platforms that give a relatively good opportunity to communicate among the users, the platforms themselves look outdated and could use refreshment as this is one of the main factors why people use those sites.
2. As the dimension of physical wellness was the least in balance among the respondents, there is an opportunity for the service providers to come up with services and products which further enhance the level of physical wellness among users such as training videos or live training courses. They could also encourage the members of the communities to meet in their local areas for physical activities and companionship in real life.
3. The research also shows that when the service provider communicated directly with their users (e.g. in comment section of the website) the users were likely to be more uplifted and eager to use the services. On the other hand, when the service provider did not pay much attention to customer relations the customers were less likely to have positive emotions associated with them. As most of the websites included in this study are branded with the personal name of the service provider, it is evident that it is important for them to lead their business by example and embody personal wellness in all its dimensions.

The author suggests the future research to focus on several aspects connected to the thesis topic. Even though the paper aimed to measure the level of personal wellness among the users it would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study to determine the influence more precisely. Secondly, it is advised to go more in depth with determining the lifestyles of the online platform users from a market segmentation point of view which would add significant value to the current thesis. Thirdly, it would be interesting to understand the connections between the goals of service providers and the expectations of the users in more detail that was included in the current study.

References

- Adler, A. (1954). *Understanding Human Nature*. New York, NY: Fawcett. (Original work published 1927)
- Allen, Derek R., Rao, Tanniru R. (2000). *Analysis of Customer Satisfaction Data*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: ASQ Quality Press.
- Anderson, W.T. and Golden, L.L. (1984), “Lifestyle and psychographics: a critical review and recommendation”, *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 405-411.
- Anspaugh, D., Hamrick, M. and Rosate, F. (2009), *Wellness: Concepts and Application*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY.
- Arnould, Eric J. and Craig Thompson (2005), “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research”, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (March), 868-82.
- Aubrey, B. (2010) *Managing Your Aspirations: Developing Personal Enterprise in the Global Workplace* McGraw-Hill [ISBN 978-0-07-131178-6](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780071311786), page 9
- Belk, R. (2013). Consumer culture theory, 2(4), 33–43. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=C-F5AgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=consumer+culture+theory&ots=hKTqAYIEz3&sig=LAdoGxaITaApYA43HOuB5vJUHe4>
- Blackwell, R. and Miniard, R.P. (1994), *Consumer Behaviour*, Dryden Press, Orlando, FL.
- Bray, J. (2008). *Consumer Behaviour Theory: Approaches and Models*, 1–33. Retrieved from http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/10107/1/Consumer_Behaviour_Theory_-_Approaches_&_Models.pdf
- Brewer, J. D. (2014). *The A-Z of Social Research Social surveys*, 302–305.
- Constantinides, E. (2008). The empowered customer and the digital myopia. *Business Strategy Series*, 9(5), 215–223. doi:10.1108/17515630810906710

Danner, U.N., Aarts, H., & de Vries, N.K. (2007). Habit formation and multiple means to goal attainment: Repeated retrieval of target means causes inhibited access to competitors. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33, 1367-1379.

Danner, U.N., Aarts, H., & de Vries, N.K. (2008). Habit vs. intention in the prediction of future behaviour: The role of frequency, context stability and mental accessibility of past behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 47, 245-265.

Duhigg, C. (2012). *The Habits of Individuals The Habits of Successful Organizations The Habits of Societies*.

Dunn, H.L. (1959), "High-level wellness for man and society", *American Journal of Public Health Nations Health*, Vol. 49 No. 6, pp. 786-792.

Fiore, A.M., Jin, H. and Kim, J. (2005), "For fun and profit: hedonic value from image interactivity and responses toward an online store", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 8, pp. 669-94.

Flick, U. (2013). *Designing Qualitative Research from an idea to a research question* From an idea to a research question Chapter objectives Interest and ideas for research : examples, 16-25.

Gajjar, B. (2013). Consumer Behavior and the Process of Purchase Decision. *International Journal of Research in Management and ...*, 2(3), 8-13. Retrieved from http://raijmr.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2_8-13-Dr.-Nilesh-B.-Gajjar.pdf

Hansen, T. and Jensen, J.M. (2009), "Shopping orientation and online clothing purchases: the role of gender and purchase situation", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 43 No. 9/10, pp. 1154-70.

Heaney, J. (2006). Generations X and Y's internet banking usage in Australia. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 11(3): 196-210.

Hettler, B. (1980), "Wellness promotion on a university campus", *Family and Community Health*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 77-95.

Hoey, T. (2008). How to turn generation Y into generation \$. Sydney Morning Herald 15th March Retrieved 22nd October 2008, from <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/15/1205472147009.html>.

Hofstede, G.H. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-320

Hughes, J. (2012). SAGE internet research methods: Comparing response rates from web and mail surveys: A meta-analysis. Doi:10.4135/9781446268513

Yelnik, "Functional Anatomy of the Basal Ganglia," *Movement Disorders* 17 (2002): 15–21.

Jang, Y. J., Kim, W. G., & Bonn, M. a. (2011). Generation Y consumers' selection attributes and behavioral intentions concerning green restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(4), 803–811. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2010.12.012

Jones, and Susannah Fox, "Generations Online in 2009," Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org> (October 17, 2010)

Jupp, V. (2006). *The Sage dictionary of social research methods* (pp. 194–196). Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=RyiL-Hi0wFcC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=The+SAGE+Dictionary+of+Social+Research+Methods&ots=Fo8d3XxUPu&sig=8HtSzBuEN973GKGDFgeCW2vDO2k>

Kardes, F.R., Cronley, M.L. and Cline, T.W. (2011), *Consumer Behavior*, South-Western Educ. Pub., Mason, OH.

Kolyesnikova, N., Dodd, T. H., & Wilcox, J. B. (2009). Gender as a moderator of reciprocal consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 26(3), 200–213. doi:10.1108/07363760910954136

Kozinets, R. (2010). Netnography: The marketer's secret weapon. Netbase Solutions, Inc, 0–12. Retrieved from <http://skitsol.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Netnography-Marketers-secret-weapon.pdf>

Kozinets, R.V. (2002), “The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 61-72.

Lagrosen, S. and Josefsson, P. (2011), “Social media marketing as an entrepreneurial learning process”, *International Journal of Technology Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 331-340.

Lally, P., Wardle, J., & Gardner, B. (2011). Experiences of habit formation: a qualitative study. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 16(4), 484–9. doi:10.1080/13548506.2011.555774

Lantos, G.P. (2011), *Consumer Behavior in Action: Real-life Applications for Marketing Managers*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY

Larivière, B., Joosten, H., Malthouse, E.C., van Birgelen, M., Aksoy, P., Kunz, W.H. and Huang, M.-H. (2013), “Value fusion – the blending of consumer and firm value in the distinct context of mobile technologies and social media”, *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 268-293.

Lawson, G., & Myers, J. E. (2011). Wellness, professional quality of life, and careersustaining behaviors: What keeps us well? *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 89(2), 163-171. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00074.x>

Lenhart, “Teens and Social Media,” Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org> (October 17, 2010).

Lorange P. and Rembiszewski J., (2014) *From Great to Gone* . Growe

Lynn R. Kahle, Angeline G. Close (2011). *Consumer Behavior Knowledge for Effective Sports and Event Marketing*. New York: Routledge. [ISBN 978-0-415-87358-1](https://doi.org/10.1080/978-0-415-87358-1).

Myers, J. E., & Sweeney, Y. J. (2005). *Wellness in counseling: Theory, research, and practice*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association

Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The Wheel of Wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78, 251–266. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/Publications/Journals.aspx>

National Wellness Institute TestWell: A Wellness Inventory. Stevens Point Wisconsin. National Wellness Institute. 1999.

Olof Lagrosen, S., & Grundén, K. (2014). Social media marketing in the wellness industry. *The TQM Journal*, 26(3), 253–260. doi:10.1108/TQM-12-2013-0129

Owen, T.R.. The reliability and validity of a wellness inventory. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 1999, 13, 180-82.

P. Paul (September 1, 2001). *Getting Inside Gen Y*. American Demographics. [http://adage.com/article/american-demographics/inside-gen-y/43704/\(link is external\)](http://adage.com/article/american-demographics/inside-gen-y/43704/(link%20is%20external)) accessed 4th May 2015

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Malhotra, A. (2005), “E-S-QUAL: a multiple-item scale for assessing electronic service quality”, *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 213-33.

Parsons, A.G. (2002), “Non-functional motives for online shoppers: why we click”, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 5, pp. 380-92.

Pessemier, E.A. and Tigert, D.J. (1966), “Personality, activity, and attitude predictors of consumer behaviour”, in Wright, J.S. and Goldstucker, J.L. (Eds), *New Ideas for Successful Marketing*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL, pp. 332-347.

Pizam, A. and Mansfeld, Y. (1999), *Consumer Behavior in Travel and Tourism*, Haworth Hospitality Press, New York, NY.

Porterfield (2015) Putting More “You” in Your Business—A Guide to Building Brand Personality. <http://www.amyporterfield.com/> available online 04.05.2015

Rageh, A., Melewar, T. C., & Woodside, A. (2013). Using netnography research method to reveal the underlying dimensions of the customer/tourist experience. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16, 126–149. doi:10.1108/13522751311317558

Reese, R., & Myers, J. (2012). EcoWellness: The missing factor in holistic wellness models. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 90(October). Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00050.x/full>

Renwick, R. and Brown, I. (1996), “Being, belonging, becoming: the Centre for Health Promotion model of quality of life”, in Renwick, R., Brown, I. and Nagler, M. (Eds), *Quality of Life in Health Promotion and Rehabilitation: Conceptual Approaches, Issues, and Applications*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 75-88

Richard, M.-O. and Chandra, R. (2005), “A model of consumer web navigational behavior: conceptual development and application”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 58, pp. 1019-29.

Rodgers, S. and Sheldon, K.M. (2002), “An improved way to characterize internet consumers”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 42 No. 5, pp. 85-94.

Rothman, A.J. (2000). Toward a theory-based analysis of behavioral maintenance. *Health Psychology*, 19, 64–69.

Rothman, A.J. (2000). Toward a theory-based analysis of behavioral maintenance. *Health Psychology*, 19, 64–69.

Schiffman, R.G. and Kanuk, L.L., *Consumer Behavior*, (2nd ed.), Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1983.

Schwarzer, R. (2008). Modeling health behavior change: How to predict and modify the adoption and maintenance of health behaviors. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57, 1–29

Schwarzer, R. (2008). Modeling health behavior change: How to predict and modify the adoption and maintenance of health behaviors. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57, 1–29

- Sheahan, P. (2005). *Generation Y: Thriving and Surviving with generation Y at work*. Australia: Hardie Grant Books
- Silverman. (2009). What You Can (and Can't) Do with Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Research* (3ed), 5–16.
- Solomon, M.R., Bamossy, G., Askegaard, S. and Hoog, M.K. (2009), *Consumer Behaviour*, Financial Times Prentice Hall, Harlow
- Sullivan, P., & Heitmeyer, J. (2008). Looking at Gen Y shopping preferences and intentions: Exploring the role of experience and apparel involvement. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 32: 285–295.
- Tractinsky, N., Cokhavi, A., Kirschenbaum, M. and Sharfi, T. (2006), “Evaluating the consistency of immediate aesthetic perceptions of webpages”, *Interaction Journal of Human-computer Studies*, Vol. 64 No. 11, pp. 1071-83
- Travis, J.W. (1981), *The Wellness Inventory*, Wellness Associates, Mill Valley, CA
- Vandelandotte, C., Sugiyama, T., Gardiner, P., & Owen, N. (2009). Associations of Leisure-Time Internet and Computer Use With Overweight and Obesity, Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviors: Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 11(3), e28. doi:10.2196/jmir.1084
- Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2004a), “Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 1-17.
- Wells, W. (1968), “Backward segmentation”, in Arndt, J. (Ed.), *Insights into Consumer Behavior*, Allyn and Bacon, New York, NY, pp. 85-100.
- Wells, W.D. (1975), “Psychographics: a critical review”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 12, pp. 196-213.
- Williams, T.G. (1982) *Consumer Behaviour: Fundamentals and Strategies*. New York, West Publishing Company.

Wilson, C.C. (1966), "Homemaker living patterns and marketplace behavior – a psychometric approach", in Wright, J.S. and Goldstucker, J.L. (Eds), *New Ideas for Successful Marketing*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL, pp. 305-347.

Witmer, J. M., & Sweeney, T. J. (1992). A holistic model for well- ness and prevention over the life span. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71, 140–148. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/Publications/Journals.aspx>

Wood, W., & Neal, D.T. (2009). The habitual consumer. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19, 579?592.

Wright, J.S. and Goldstucker, J.L. (1966), *New Ideas for Successful Marketing*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL.

Wright, R. (2006), *Consumer Behaviour*, Thompson Learning, London.

Appendix 1

Coding Scheme for the content analysis – Definitions of the dimensions of wellness.

Table 4 Dimensions of Personal Wellness

Dimension of wellness	Description	Words describing this dimension of wellness
Social	The ability to relate to and connect with other people in our world. The ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with family, friends and co-workers.	community, relationships, support group, connection, active connector
Emotional	The ability to understand oneself and cope with the challenges life can bring. The ability to acknowledge and share feelings of anger, fear, sadness or stress; hope, love.	feelings, sharing of feelings, respect for the feelings of others, ability to separate from one's feelings and emotions
Spiritual	The ability to establish peace and harmony in our lives. The ability to develop congruence between values and actions and to realize a common purpose that binds creation together.	congruence between values and actions, connection with the divine,
Environmental	The ability to recognize one's responsibility for the quality of the air, the water and the surrounding land. The ability to make a positive impact on the quality of the environment is it homes, communities or the planet.	being environmentally conscious, the ability and intention to have a positive impact on the environment, communal activities
Occupational	The ability to get personal fulfilment from one's jobs or a chosen career fields while still maintaining balance in life. A desire to contribute in one's career to make a positive impact on the organizations and to society as a whole	professional fulfilment, enjoyment from job, work-life balance, feeling that the job that you do has impact

Table 4 continued

Dimension of wellness	Description	Words describing this dimension of wellness
Intellectual	The ability to keep an open mind to new ideas and experiences that can be applied to personal decisions, group interaction and community betterment. The desire to learn new concepts, improve skills and seek challenges in pursuit of lifelong learning.	knowledge, skills, articulated opinions, openness to new ideas, continuous learning
Physical	The ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows one to get through daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress. The ability to recognize that behaviours have a significant impact on the wellness and adopting healthful habits (routine checkups, a balanced diet, exercise, etc.) while avoiding destructive habits (tobacco, drugs, alcohol, etc.)	Caring for one's body, exercise, yoga, nutrition, taking responsibility for one's physical health.

Source: Adapted from TestWell (1992)

Appendix 2

Results of the content analysis

Table 5 Results of the Content Analysis

Website	Most frequent themes	Example
marieforleo.com	Occupational Wellness Spiritual Wellness Social Wellness	"I made over \$50,000 in a few weeks with my first online product!!! Woohooo! I never thought I could do it, but I did. Working with Marie pays off."
gabbyb.tv	Spiritual Wellness Emotional Wellness	I've finally become more loving and accepting of myself, recognizing that I'm already perfect as I am. I'm deepening my meditation practice and have gone to yoga 4 times in the past week, when for whatever reason, I was blocking myself off from doing it. I'm believing in myself to successfully launch my health coaching practice and little miracles are appearing to help me on that path. I've become more open to my own healing (I have a LOT of physical issues
kriscarr.com	Physical Wellness Nutrition Emotional Wellness	In the middle of trying to change my physical, emotional and career paths, your website, emails and amazing food ideas bring me hope every day.
daniellelaporte.com	Emotional Wellness Spiritual Wellness Occupational Wellness	Her other book, The Fire Starter Sessions, jump-started my current career and put me on the path to doing exactly what I love and being more clear about my vision.
mentorschannel.com	Spiritual Wellness Social Wellness	Thank you for all the posts. Sometimes this is just what a person needs I am new to this page. I am very interested in seeing what comes out OSHO'S meditation this morning from head to heart.

Table 5 continued

Website	Most frequent	Example
---------	---------------	---------

	themes	
juicemaster.com	Physical Wellness Nutrition Intellectual Wellness	I learnt so much and it was great to surround myself with so many enthusiastic and motivational people.
foodmatters.tv	Physical Wellness Nutrition Intellectual Wellness Social Wellness Environmental Wellness	Today, 17 months later, I live a fully organic, whole food lifestyle, still working closely with my naturopathic doctor, pursuing further education in homeopathy and holistic nutrition... I work for a huge marketing company to make ends meet by day, and by night I experiment with food, I research, I study to keep my fire alive for my own interest in holistic nutrition.

Appendix 3

Quantity of the codes and sources

Table 6 Quantity of the Codes and Sources

Dimension of wellness	Sources	Mentions
Physical wellness		
Added physical activity	5	34
Nutrition	4	62
Illness remission	3	123
Social wellness		
Personal relationships	7	236
Online communities	7	221
Emotional wellness		
Inspiration	7	472
Self awareness	5	243
Spiritual wellness		
Spiritual practice	4	68
Relationship with the divine	3	44
Environmental wellness		
	1	3
Occupational wellness		
Financial gain	4	67
Personal business	4	125
Improved work relationships	5	216
Improved work-life balance	5	90
Intellectual wellness		
Gaining new knowledge	7	238

Appendix 4

TestWell Questionnaire

Source: National Wellness Institution (www.testwell.org)

1. Physical Activity

Almost never/Occasionally/Often/Very Often/Always

- 1.1. I engage in sweat-producing physical activity for 20-30 minutes at least three times per week.
- 1.2. My physical activity includes stretching, aerobic activity and strength conditioning.
- 1.3. I walk or bicycle as a means of transportation whenever possible
- 1.4. An integral part of my leisure time includes physical activity instead of TV viewing or surfing the Internet.
- 1.5.5 If I am not in shape, I avoid sporadic (once per week or less) strenuous exercise. (If you are in shape answer "Almost Always")

2. Nutrition

- 2.1. I eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. (one serving equals one piece of fruit or 1/2 cup)
- 2.2. I avoid eating at fast food restaurants.
- 2.3. I intentionally include foods that are high in fiber in my diet on a daily basis. (i.e. whole grain breads and cereals, beans, etc.)
- 2.4. I maintain my weight within the recommendations for my height and gender.
- 2.5. I avoid eating foods that are high in fat (whole milk dairy products, fried foods, hot dogs, desserts, gravies, and fatty meats)

3. Self-Care

- 3.1. I avoid the use of tobacco products. (cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, cigars, pipes)
- 3.2. I examine my breasts or testes on a monthly basis.

3.3. I protect my skin from sun damage by using sunscreen, wearing hats, and/or avoiding tanning booths and sun lamps.

3.4. I maintain my blood pressure within the range recommended by my doctor. (If you do not have your blood pressure checked, answer "Almost Never")

3.5. I floss my teeth every day.

4. Safety

4.1. I wear a seat belt when traveling in a vehicle.

4.2. I stay within five miles per hour of the speed limit.

4.3. I avoid riding with drivers who are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

4.4. I avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs.

4.5. I use the recommended safety equipment (pads, mouth guards, goggles, life jacket, etc.) for any activity I participate in.

5. Social and environmental wellness

5.1. I regularly recycle my paper, plastic, glass or aluminium.

5.2. My behaviour reflects fairness and justice.

5.3. I take time to play with my family and friends.

5.4. When I notice something that is dangerous to others I take action to correct it.

5.5. I contribute time and/or money to at least one organization that strives to better the community where I live.

6. Emotional awareness and sexuality

6.1. My sexual relationships and behaviours are maintained in a manner that is healthy for me and for others.

6.2. I am able to develop close intimate, personal relationships.

6.3. I am tolerant of others who have different sexual orientations.

6.4. If I engage in sexual behaviour I take action to avoid unwanted pregnancy. (If you do not engage in sexual intercourse, answer "Almost Always".)

6.5. I feel positive about myself as a sexual person.

7. Emotional management

7.1. I express my feelings of anger in ways that are not hurtful to others.

7.2. I set realistic objectives for myself.

7.3. When I make mistakes, I learn from them.

7.4. I do not feel unreasonably hurried in my daily routine.

7.5. I accept responsibility for my own actions.

8. Intellectual Wellness

8.1. I keep informed about social, political and/or current issues.

8.2. I watch educational programs on television every week, (News, political discussions, documentaries, public TV, or the Discovery channel).

8.3. I seek opportunities to learn new things.

8.4. Before making decisions, I gather facts.

8.5. I participate in activities such as visiting museums, exhibits, and zoos, or attending plays and concerts at least three times a year.

9. Occupational Wellness

9.1. I enjoy my work.

9.2. I am satisfied with the balance between my work time and leisure time.

9.3. I am satisfied with my ability to manage and control my workload.

9.4. My work is consistent with my values.

9.5. At work my level of authority is consistent with my level of responsibility.

10. Spirituality and Values

10.1. I feel that my life has a positive purpose.

10.2. My leisure time activities are consistent with my values.

- 10.3. My actions are guided by my own beliefs, rather than the beliefs of others.
- 10.4. I spend a portion of every day in prayer, meditation, and/or personal reflection.
- 10.5. I am tolerant of the values and beliefs of others.

Summary in Estonian

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks on mõista, missugust mõju avaldavad veebipõhised enese arendamise keskkonnad kasutaja heaolule, harjumustele ja elustiilile. Uurimustöö pealkiri tõlgituna eesti keelde kõlab: „Veebipõhiste enesearenduskeskkondade mõju kasutajate heaolule, harjumustele ja elustiilile.“ Uurimustöö on jaotatud kolmeks osaks uurides esmalt nimetatud keskkondade mõju kasutajate heaolule. Andmete kogumiseks on kasutatud veebipõhist küsitlust, kusjuures isikliku heaolu taseme mõõtmiseks koostatud küsimustik on kokku pandud TestWell küsimustiku põhjal, mille on koostanud National Wellness Institute (1992) See küsimustik kasutab inimese isikliku heaolu mõõtmiseks kümmet parameetrit, mille hulka kuuluvad:

- Füüsiline heaolu,
- Toitumine,
- Eneseabi,
- Ohutus,
- Sotsiaalne heaolu,
- Emotsionaalne ja seksuaalne heaolu,
- Emotsionaalne heaolu,
- Intellektuaalne heaolu,
- Professionaalne heaolu,
- Väärtused ja uskumused.

Veebipõhistel teenusepakkujatel on tänu käesoleva uurimuse tulemustele võimalik oma tooteid ja teenuseid edasi arendada, et need oleksid veel rohkem vastavuses kasutajate ootustega. Edasises teadustöös oleks huvitav uurida, kuidas haakuvad omavahel teenusepakkujate eesmärgid ning kasutajate ootused. Selleks, et veelgi täpsemalt mõista veebikeskkondade otsest mõju kasutajate heaolule, tuleks teostada suurema valimiga pikaajaline uuring. See annaks võimaluse ka andmetele tuginedes põhjalikumaid järeldusi teha.

Kasutades pikaajalist uuringut, on võimalik kindlaks teha, kas ja kui palju täpselt veebipõhised enesearendamise teenused tõstavad kasutaja isiklikku heaolu. Selline uurimus on aga magistritöö raames liialt mahukas ning seetõttu on käesolev töö pigem ülevaatliku iseloomuga. Lisaks eelnimetatule oleks vajalik rühmitada ka erinevad kasutajaprofiilid kasutades erinevaid elustiili segmenteerimise teooriaid, et vastavat populatsiooni paremini tundma õppida.

Käesolevas töös uuritud veebikeskkonnad keskenduvad kasutajate nõustamisele ning informatsiooni jagamisele erinevates valdkondades, mida saab liigitada heaolu parameetrite alla. Kõik internetikeskkonnad pakuvad nii tasuta kui ka tasulisi tooteid ja teenuseid nagu videod, loengud, testid, juhised ja e-raamatud. Samuti annavad need kasutajaile võimaluse suhelda inimestega, kellel on sarnased huvid ja mõttemaailm. Täpsema ülevaate kõikidest töös uuritud veebikeskkondadest leiab kirjanduse ülevaate peatükist.

Internetikeskkondade mõju kasutaja heaolule pole senini palju uuritud. Sellegipoolest kasutavad paljud teenusepakkujad tervislike eluviiside ja isikliku heaolu edendamiseks edukalt kaasaegseid kanaleid ja platvorme. Veebipõhisus annab võimaluse jõuda suurema sihtgrupini üle kogu maailma. Lähtudes Facebooki ja YouTube'i järgijate arvudest võib antud töösse kaasatud veebikeskkondade kasutajate arvuks pidada umbes 2 596 000 inimest.

Uurimustöö tulemused on olulised teenusepakkujatele, kuna lisavad valdkonnas toimuvale teadusliku perspektiivi andes aimu faktoritest, mis motiveerivad kliente vastavaid tooteid ja teenuseid kasutama. Samuti annab töö ülevaate kasutajate harjumustest ja eluviisist ning nende mõjust kasutaja isiklikule heaolule. Uurimuse tulemusi arvesse võttes, võivad teenusepakkujad oma tooteid ja teenuseid edasi arendada, et kasutajate soove ja vajadusi paremini tabada.

Uurimisküsimus koosneb kolmest osast: esiteks uuritakse veebipõhiste enesearendamise keskkondade mõju kasutaja heaolule. Vastava mõju hindamiseks kasutatakse küsitlust, kus erinevate isikliku heaolu parameetrite mõõtmiseks on kasutatud National Wellness Institute'i poolt 1992 aastal välja arendatud TestWell kontseptsiooni. Saadud tulemusi võrreldakse etalonrühmaga – rühm inimesi üldisest elanikkonnast, kes on samale

küsimustikule vastanud National Wellness Institute'i kodulehel TestWell.org. Täiendavat informatsiooni etalongrupi kohta võib leida. Töö kolmandast peatükist. Töö teises osas kasutatakse veebikeskkondadest leitudvate kommentaaride sisuanalüüsi. Selle eesmärgiks on mõista, kuidas eelnimetatud veebikeskkonnad on mõjutanud kasutajaid nende harjumuste muutmisel. Kolmandas osas kirjeldatakse kogutud andmetest lähtuvalt, millised on uurimuses osalenud kasutajate elustiilinäitajad sotsiaalmajanduslikust ning hariduslikust aspektist.

Käesoleva magistritööga tuvastati mitmeid viise, kuidas veebikeskkondadel põhinevad enese arendamise teenused mõjutavad kasutajate üldist heaolu. National Wellness Institute'i parameetrite kohaselt võib uuringus osalenud enese arendamise veebikeskkondade kasutajate isiklikku heaolu erinevates valdkondades pidada suurepäraseks, kuna heaolu keskmine väärtus oli 4.05, samas, kui skaala maksimumväärtus on 5.

Paljud kasutajad pidasid oluliseks mainida, et ainuüksi vastavate veebikeskkondade kasutamine avaldab nende käitumisele vähem mõju ning suuremate muutuste elluviimiseks elustiili parandamisel peab motivatsioon siiski tulema inimese enda poolt. Sellele vaatamata peeti eelnimetatud keskkondi heaks informatsiooni- ja toetuse allikaks.

Uurimusest selgus, et isikliku heaolu tase enesearengu veebikeskkondade kasutajate seas on kõrgem, kui võrdlusgrupis. Ometi, füüsilise tervise näitajad olid üldpopulatsiooniga võrreldes siiski madalamad. Kuna uuringus osales vaid 101 vastajat, siis pole võimalik töös liiga üldistavaid järeldusi teha või kindlalt väita, et kõrgem heaolu tase on tingitud just vastavate veebikeskkondade kasutamisest.

Veebikülgede kasulik mõju kasutajate käitumises ja harjumustes väljendub füüsilise aktiivsuse, vaimsete praktikate, toitumisvalikute ning suhtlemismustrite muutuses, mida kasutajad teevad igapäevaselt. Seega, on selge, et kasutajad soovivad parandada oma üldist heaolu ning liiguvad väikeste sammude haaval oma elu täiustamisele lähemale. Lähtudes Duhigg'i (2012) harjumuste loomise tsüklist, võib öelda, et veebikeskkondadest saadav informatsioon ja tugi annab kasutajatele tõuke oma harjumuste ja mõjub "päästikuna" mis paneb inimesed õiges suunas liikuma.

Uurimusest avaldunud tulemused annavad võimaluse anda soovitusi nii teenusepakkujale teenuste ja toodete edasiarendamiseks, kui ka veebikeskkondade kasutajatele maksimaalse kasu saamiseks vastavate keskkondade kasutamisel.

Esiteks, kasutajate seisukohalt on oluline, et:

1. Uuringus osalejad kasutasid veebipõhiseid enesearendamise keskkondi keskmiselt 57 minutit päevas. See on küllaltki pikk aeg, ning üleliigne internet kasutamine võib lõpuks inimese isikliku heaolu seisukohalt sootuks ohtlikuks osutada.
2. Veebipõhiste enesearendamise keskkondade kasutamine ei garanteeri kõrgemat isikliku heaolu taset. Pigem inspireerivad need keskkonnad kasutajaid oma käitumises muutusi ellu viima, ent käitumise muutuseks tuleb siiski kasutajal endal vajalik otsus teha.

Teenusepakkujatele on oluline teada, et:

1. Peamine põhjus, miks inimesed veebipõhiseid enesearendamise keskkondi kasutavad, on nende inspireeriv toime, võime kasutajat täiendavalt motiveerida ning võimalus saada kaaskasutajatelt tuge ning tagasisidet. Mõni teenusekasutajatest on juba rõhutanud oma turundustöös eelnimetatud aspektidele, ent erinevaid võimalusi kasutajate omavahelise suhtluse elavdamiseks ja kogemuste jagamiseks on veelgi. Võib veel lisada, et kuigi säärased platvormid annavad hea võimaluse kasutajate omavaheliseks suhtluseks, siis keskkonnad ise on mitmel juhul vananenud ja mitte väga kasutajasõbralikud ning vajaksid värskendust.
2. Kasutajate seas oli kõige madalama keskmise väärtusega füüsilise heaolu (aktiivsuse) mõõde. Seega on teenusepakkujatel võimalus välja tulla teenuste ja toodetega, mis rõhutaksid just seda heaolu aspekti, mis näitas vastanute seas kõige madalamat tulemust. Samuti võiksid teenusepakkujad julgustada kasutajaid kohtuma ka päriselt, et koos näiteks mõnd spordiala harrastada.
3. Uurimusest selgus ka, et juhul kui teenusepakkuja suhtles (veebikeskkonna kommentaariumis) otseselt kasutajaga, siis olid kasutajad

rohkem elevil ja valmist tooteid ja teenuseid kasutama. Otsene ja kiire suhtlus klientidega on oluline, sest selle puudumisel kasutaja suure tõenäosusega toodet kasutama ei hakka. Enamuse selles töös kajastatud veebikeskkondade eestvedajateks on üks tugev isiksus, kes annab oma iseloomuga edasi brändi identiteeti, nad peavad justkui olema isiklikuks eeskujuks kõikidele kasutajatele, et oma äris edukas olla.

Tulevastes teadustöodes võiks autori arvamusel kajastada erinevaid uurimustöö teema tahke. Kuigi töö eesmärk oli mõõta isikliku heaolu taset veebikeskkondade kasutajate seas, siis põhjalikum ja pikaajalisem uuring kasutajate ostukäitumisest, isiklikust heaolust pikemas perspektiivis ning veebikeskkondade kasutamise mõjust sellele. Teiseks, oleks soovitav täpsemini määratlada kasutajate elustiil kasutades erinevaid elustiili teooriaid. Kolmandaks, on oluline mõista, mil määral langevad kokku teenusepakkujate ning kasutajate huvid ning ootused vastavas valdkonnas.

Non-exclusive license to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Kaisa Rahuoja

(author's name)

1. herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive license) to:

1.1. reproduce, for the purpose of preservation and making available to the public, including for addition to the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright, and

1.2. make available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright,

THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE SELF-DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ON USERS' PERSONAL WELLNESS, HABITS AND LIFESTYLE

(title of thesis)

supervised by Melanie. K. Smith PhD

(supervisor's name)

2. I am aware of the fact that the author retains these rights.

3. I certify that granting the non-exclusive license does not infringe the intellectual property rights or rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act.

Pärnu, 20.05.2015